ENGLISH

ADULTS ONLY: WHEN LIVING WITH CHILDREN BECAME ABNORMAL

On the inversion of normality, comfort, and generational exclusion

Xema Gatnau · August 2026

Concept image: adults-only comfort set against generational continuity.

There is a recurring debate that increasingly angers me: adults-only hotels, adults-only restaurants and, progressively, all kinds of adults-only spaces.

I would understand the expression perfectly if it meant a place specifically reserved for adult activities: a nudist hotel, a sexual venue, a club where orgies take place, or any activity objectively incompatible with the presence of minors.

But that is usually not what it means.

It means something much simpler: we do not want children because they are annoying.

And that is what I find difficult to understand.

We are not talking about protecting children from something they should not see. We are talking about protecting adults from children: from their shouting, their crying, their running around, their questions, their unpredictability; from everything children have done for as long as our species has existed.

And we have managed to turn the absence of children into a luxury product. Pay more and there are no children. Pay more and nobody cries. Pay more and nobody runs around the pool. Pay more and, for a few days, you can pretend that humanity begins at eighteen.

It strikes me as an extraordinarily revealing image of our age.

“We are not talking about protecting children from something they should not see. We are talking about protecting adults from children.”

1. The inversion of normality

There is something here that goes far beyond hospitality. We are completely altering our categories of what is normal and abnormal.

For virtually all of human history, societies were full of children. There was no adult world radically separated from the world of childhood. Children were in homes, streets, squares, workshops, meals, celebrations and journeys.

Not because our ancestors were especially tolerant, but because that was what a human society was. Intergenerational coexistence was not a public policy, a moral theory or an awareness campaign. It was a fact.

The child was part of the human landscape just as the elderly person was. And now we are managing to make that presence look anomalous: children in a restaurant become an inconvenience; children in a hotel, a nuisance; children making noise, almost an aggression against the consumer who has paid to “switch off”.

It is an extraordinary inversion: what was absolutely normal for thousands of years is beginning to look like a disturbance of normality.

2. And here an uncomfortable comparison appears

There is an even more striking inversion when we look at other forms of coexistence that our society regards as morally obligatory.

For much of history, human beings lived in relatively homogeneous communities and maintained strong distances from other ethnic, religious, national or cultural groups. That does not prove such separation was morally good. History does not automatically turn a practice into a virtue.

But it does allow us to point to a fact: everyday, equal and mass coexistence among populations of very different racial, religious and cultural origins has not been the ordinary condition of most historical societies.

Our contemporary world has decided -for moral reasons that can be defended- to make precisely that coexistence a norm. And it has gone even further: it has made it taboo to say, “I would rather not live alongside a certain ethnic group,” “I would prefer a space without members of a certain religion,” or “I am uncomfortable living alongside people of a certain origin.”

The contemporary answer is clear: your private discomfort is not a sufficient reason to exclude another person from the common space.

And here is what I find fascinating. That same society calmly accepts: “I do not want children.” It does not merely accept it. It markets it. Advertises it. Turns it into a hotel category. Makes it premium.

3. I am not defending racial discrimination

This should be stated clearly, because when one makes a comparison it can immediately be interpreted as a moral equation between its two terms.

I am not saying that hotels should be allowed to ban particular races. I am saying something different. I am asking what criterion we are using.

If our social philosophy says that coexistence requires us to tolerate a certain amount of discomfort caused by people we did not choose, why does that principle suddenly disappear when the people causing the discomfort are children?

If my argument for excluding someone were “their presence makes me uncomfortable and I want peace,” we would regard it as scandalously insufficient when applied to almost any protected identity. Yet when applied to children it becomes a marketing campaign: ADULTS ONLY. PEACE. RELAX. NO CHILDREN.

Does nobody find this inversion strange?

4. What was historically exceptional becomes an obligation; what was universal becomes a nuisance

This is the paradox that interests me. We have been capable of saying that certain instincts of separation between groups must be educated, restrained or overcome because there is a higher moral principle of coexistence. Fine.

But at the same time we are educating society in exactly the opposite direction with respect to children. Not: “learn to live with them.” Rather: “pay to avoid them.”

And this is even more paradoxical because intergenerational coexistence requires no sophisticated philosophical justification. Without coexistence between generations there is no society.

We were all children. We all annoyed people. We all cried. We all interrupted conversations. We all made some meal unbearable. We all occasionally forced adults who had not chosen our existence to put up with us.

Humanity exists because, for thousands of generations, adults have put up with children.

“Without coexistence between generations there is no society.”

5. The perfect liberal luxury

That is why I think adults only represents something very specific about our culture: liberal luxury carried to its logical conclusion.

I am not using liberalism here as a strict economic theory, but as a certain anthropology: the sovereign individual; the consumer individual; the individual who has paid and, precisely because they have paid, believes they have acquired the right to control their environment completely.

I do not want noise. I do not want interruptions. I do not want obligations. I do not want people I did not choose. I do not want children.

The market answers: no problem. We can sell you a tailor-made reality. A room without children. A pool without children. A restaurant without children. A cruise without children. A world conveniently sterilised of everything that reminds the individual that they are not the last generation of humanity.

That seems more important to me than the legal discussion over whether an establishment has the right to do it. There are probably contexts in which it is perfectly reasonable. My problem is cultural: what does the growing demand for it reveal?

6. The child as a market failure

The child is beginning to be treated as a kind of negative externality. Parents bear the cost of raising a child. But the child also imposes small costs on everyone who encounters them: noise, space, patience, delays, interruptions.

And our contemporary individual asks: “Why should I have to put up with this if the child is not mine?” The question sounds rational. It is also devastating.

Taken to its conclusion, it turns reproduction into a strictly private matter whose costs belong exclusively to parents, while the future benefits of there being another generation remain collective.

Thirty years from now we will all want doctors, nurses, workers, farmers, engineers and people who keep the systems we use running. Yet today we can become angry because those future doctors, nurses, workers and engineers are running around our table.

7. The diversity we seem not to like

Our age talks constantly about diversity. Yet there is one kind of diversity we hardly ever mention: generational diversity.

A society is made up of children, young people, adults and the elderly. All have characteristics that may inconvenience others. Children make noise. Teenagers can be loud. Older people may walk slowly. Sick people may need help. Disabled people may require adaptations.

Coexistence means accepting that the common space was not designed exclusively to maximise our individual comfort.

That is why I find it so strange that we have come to identify the absence of children with luxury.

8. I do not want to ban it. I want to be able to judge it.

This connects to something I consider fundamental. The fact that something should be legal does not mean it must appear morally neutral.

I do not want the police entering a hotel because it has chosen to specialise in adult customers. Nor do I want a state forcing anyone to have children. My argument comes before the law. It is moral and cultural.

It is legitimate to ask what kind of society we are building when we begin to treat childhood as something from which it is desirable to isolate ourselves.

And it is even more legitimate to point out the contradiction of a culture that demands -sometimes rightly- that we overcome our discomfort with almost every kind of human difference, while immediately treating discomfort with children as a respectable preference.

“The fact that something should be legal does not mean it must appear morally neutral.”

9. What used to be taboo and what is taboo now

Not so long ago, publicly saying that one wanted a hotel “without a certain race” would have represented precisely the kind of segregation our societies decided to make morally intolerable. It remains so today.

Yet saying “I want a hotel without children” can appear on an elegant website next to a glass of wine, an infinity pool and the words peace & relax.

One exclusion became taboo. The other became a product.

And the paradox is that mass interracial coexistence is a relatively recent historical construction in many societies, while coexistence between children and adults is as old as our species.

Again: this does not make racial segregation good. It demonstrates something else. It demonstrates that we are perfectly capable of telling the individual: “your preference, even if it exists, must yield to certain requirements of coexistence.” We do this constantly.

Therefore the argument “some people simply do not like children” settles absolutely nothing. Many people dislike many things. The moral question has always been: what inconveniences are we legitimately entitled to ask one another to bear so that a common world can continue to exist?

10. Perhaps the problem is not the children

Perhaps a civilisation that increasingly needs hotels, restaurants, residential developments, flights and spaces specifically designed to avoid encountering children should ask whether children are really the problem.

Perhaps the problem is our declining tolerance for frustration. Perhaps we have confused well-being with the complete absence of inconvenience. Perhaps we have elevated personal comfort into the supreme moral criterion.

And perhaps that is why the child is particularly offensive to our age. Children break schedules. They break silences. They break plans. They demand things. They remind adults that other people exist.

Above all, they remind us of something even more uncomfortable: the world does not end with us.

The child is the physical negation of absolute individualism: someone who does not yet produce, who needs to receive, who requires sacrifice, who depends on an earlier generation and who, if all goes well, will continue after we are gone.

11. A civilisation that symbolically expels its future

That is perhaps why the adults-only concept troubles me so much when it ceases to be exceptional and begins to become a cultural aspiration.

Not because I think a weekend without children marks the end of the West. But because symbols matter. And this one is extraordinarily clear: we have begun to sell the absence of the next generation as a luxury.

While our birth rates fall. While we age. While we constantly ask who will sustain our pensions, healthcare and care systems. While we wonder why fewer and fewer children are being born.

Perhaps part of the answer is culturally much simpler than we want to admit. For decades we have been telling ourselves that having children is a burden, that sacrifice is suspect, that the highest form of fulfilment is complete control over one’s own time. And now we have even turned not having to see other people’s children into a superior experience.

It is difficult to imagine a better metaphor.

A civilisation that needs to protect adults from the presence of its own children may not have a problem with children. It may have a problem with the very idea of continuity.

Coda: a truly adults-only world

We wanted hotels without children.

Restaurants without children.

Pools without children.

Flights without children.

Streets without noise.

Homes without sacrifice.

A perfectly comfortable life.

Perhaps we will end up getting it.

A truly adults-only world.

Except that then it will no longer be a hotel.

It will be the last civilisation: that of the last children, the last adults, and the last old people.

Xema Gatnau